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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003355

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IZ JO

SUBJECT: JORDAN'S NEW AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ: WE'RE COMMITTED
TO IRAQ'S STABILITY AND SUPPORT THE SOFA

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Jordan's new Ambassador to Iraq, Nayef Fantoul al-Zeidan, told Ambassador Crocker October 18 that Jordan sees Iraq's stability as key to its own. Al-Zeidan, who arrived October 15 and presented credentials to Foreign Minister Zebari and President Talabani October 16, said that King Abdullah had told him that strengthening Jordanian-Iraqi ties "is important to us and important to our friends; we want to help you any way we can." Ambassador Crocker said the U.S. and Jordan have a strong strategic relationship. Al-Zeidan's posting is evidence of that. He noted that Jordan played a positive, influential and critical role with Iraq's Sunni tribes in their decision to stand against al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). Similarly, King Abdullah's commitment to engage all of Iraq's communities will be very helpful as we move forward, something al-Zeidan said he supported fully.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Crocker stressed that for the first time since the 1958 revolution, Iraq has a government that has a fundamentally different and constructive approach to the region and to the international community more generally. Both Jordan and the U.S. have a strong interest in supporting that. In this context, King Abdullah's August visit to Baghdad was an important signal of support and has helped build momentum throughout the region, as shown by the subsequent string of senior Arab officials who have visited Baghdad including Lebanese PM Siniora, UAE Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayid, Egyptian FM Abul Gheit and Bahraini FM Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad al-Khalifa. Ambassador Crocker underlined that both the U.S. and Jordan have an interest in ensuring that Iraq approves the SOFA so that there is a legal basis for the continued presence of U.S. troops after December 31. Jordanian support at this critical juncture, he stressed, would be extremely helpful. Al-Zeidan responded that failure to conclude a SOFA "would be a disaster... Jordan views your presence here as good for stability and we support it."

¶3. (C) As the meeting concluded, al-Zeidan said that his DCM, Adli Khalidi (who was also in the meeting), would remain in Baghdad with several other Jordanian diplomats to oversee renovation of the IZ villa that will house Jordan's new embassy. Ambassador Crocker said we looked forward to working with Al-Zeidan and his team and would offer advice and assistance as we can as they establish their diplomatic presence here.

CROCKER